



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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National Veterans Wheelchair Games Come to St. Louis

WASHINGTON – More than 500 disabled veterans will compete in the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world, the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, June 15-19 in St. Louis. Veterans from the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq will join the competitors at the games this year.

“The National Veterans Wheelchair Games give our nation’s disabled veterans the opportunity to once again enjoy rigorous athletic competition,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. “Every year these heroes demonstrate their talent, stamina and determination at this outstanding event, the same qualities they exhibited when helping preserve our nation’s freedom. I’m especially pleased the games are in St. Louis this year, one of America’s premiere sports cities.”

The Wheelchair Games, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), are open to all U.S. military veterans who use wheelchairs for sports competition due to spinal cord injuries, certain neurological conditions, amputations or other mobility impairments. The St. Louis VA Medical Center, VA’s Heartland Network and the PVA Gateway Chapter are hosting the 2004 games.

“Athletes competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games represent the epitome of courage and determination,” said PVA National President Joseph L. Fox Sr. “These men and women are role models not only for having served their country in the military, but also for their ability to rise above their disabilities in competition to achieve their personal best.”

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Sports are important in the therapy used to treat many disabilities. VA is a recognized leader in rehabilitation, with therapy programs available at VA health care facilities across the nation. For many injured veterans, the Wheelchair Games provide their first exposure to wheelchair athletics.

At the games, veterans will compete in track and field, swimming, basketball, weightlifting, softball, air guns, quad-rugby, 9-ball, bowling, table tennis, archery, handcycling, a motorized rally, wheelchair slalom and power soccer.

The 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games begin June 15 with a wheelchair basketball demonstration at Kiener Plaza, as well as the 2004 Disabled Sports, Recreation and Fitness Expo. At the opening ceremonies on June 15, baseball hall of famer Brooks Robinson will deliver inspirational remarks, and St. Louis sports legend Stan Musial will also greet the athletes. Secretary Principi will address the veterans, along with PVA Executive Director Delatorro L. McNeil.

During the week, actress Bo Derek, Honorary Chairperson of VA's National Rehabilitation Special Events, will attend the games to visit with athletes and present medals. "Kids Day at the Games" takes place at East St. Louis High School on June 18, when more than 50 local children with disabilities will meet the wheelchair athletes, watch them compete and learn about the track and field events.

Many of the events will be held at St. Louis' America's Center, also the site for the opening and closing ceremonies. Other venues include Shaw Aquatic Center, North Oaks Bowl, St. Clair Lanes, East St. Louis High School, Forest Park, Winchester Trap & Skeet and the St. Louis Zoo.

For more information about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, or to follow events as they happen, visit the games' Web site at <http://www.wheelchairgames.org>

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Media Inquiries:

During the Games from June 14-19, call the National Veterans Wheelchair Games Media Center at (314) 342-5453 or 342-5454.

Before June 12 or after June 20, call Kim Byers, VA Public Affairs, at (734) 761-7824; or Bob Ensinger, PVA Director of Communication at (202) 416-7681.